

Unexpected AKA Necromancer's Beginnings...DONE

by DeBrabant

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Summary: Don't judge a book by it's cover, especially when it comes to Xander Harris...Who'd have ever thought?

Unexpected AKA Necromancer's Beginnings...DONE

Xander was sick. He was so sick of being the extra. It had started almost a year ago, the feeling of uselessness that had crept up on him like some kind of icky demon he should fight. But this was one demon that Buffy and the gang only made worse, and he had no weapon to attack it with. Nor did he posses a helpful escape vehicle. It's very hard to run away from one's self.

>
So the feeling of uselessness had continued to grow. Every knock from a vampire, every time he was thrown aside so that the monster could get to his friends was another blow to his pride and feeling of worth. Willow at least had her witchcraft. And while that wasn't very useful during an actual battle, it had helped from the sidelines on more than one occasion. Buffy was, well, Buffy, and Giles was the Watcher, the know-it-all, kickass dude. Spike, while annoying and a bother, could at least match the fiends blow for blow, and Anya was a font of information when it came to knowing the more intricate workings of demons and how they think. So that left him. Useless, Jimmy Olsen-wannabe Xander.

>
But recently, he had to admit, things had taken an even stranger turn. For the last few days, he'd had to stop himself from practically begging to go on patrol with Buffy in the graveyard. It wasn't because he wanted to be included, at least not entirely. He liked it there. It was an eerie feeling he got when he was there, an almost comfortable familiarity in that place of the dead. He could never explain it to the others; they'd probably think he was a crazy or just plain sick.

>
It was the only place where he felt okay. Everywhere else, even his own room, had a foreboding air to it, as if something was going to strike at him at any moment. Though no one knew it, he'd taken to bringing a blanket and pillow to a small ancient corner of the cemetery and camping out. He had to be very careful. He didn't want anyone or anything to find him there. Whoever did would either expose him or kill him. It was insane, but he couldn't sleep anywhere else.

>
He didn't know what to do, whom to turn to. His friends were too wrapped up in their own lives to really understand. Actually, he thought with awry mental laugh, Buffy was more wrapped up in that damn commando's arms than anything else. And Willow had whatever she had with Tara. And Anya? Like she'd love someone who slept in a cemetery half the time? Giles? He didn't even want to think about it. So where did all that leave him? It left him grabbing a sheet, a quilt, a pillow and a bit of water and heading out to the Sunnydale Memorial Cemetery.

>

>
"Giles, I had the weirdest dream last night. I mean, like one of the Slayer dreams."

>
Giles looked up from his desk to see his favorite (and only) Vampire Slayer having, as she herself put it, the "wiggins" on his doorstep. He reminded himself that he should get a more secure lock in the future, and then answered:

>
"What did you see, Buffy? Was it a demon, or a face? Some kind of dark feeling?"

>
Buffy came in the door, and then sat on a chair near the desk. "Well, I was in the cemetery. You know, the one by Wilson Street, about three blocks from Xander's house, and I saw this middle aged man. He was dressed completely normal and everything, though he seems to be into the tweed look a bit." Giles grimaced. "Anyway, he had dark brown, maybe even black hair with completely white streaks above his ears, and his eyes were a light blue. And then the dream got weird. When I looked at his eyes, I got pulled over to him, and dark blue flame spread all over me. I started to scream, but not scream exactly, well...anyway, and then I heard a voice. I knew the voice, but I couldn't tell whose it was. The pain stopped and I woke up."

>
Giles' look, which had started out as mild interest, was now something in-between panic and complete surprise. "Blue flames you said?"

>
"Yeah, dark blue."

>
"I think it might be Azrael's Flame which you are speaking of..." Giles said in a distracted tone, standing up and walking over to the bookshelf. He scanned over many books, until he apparently found the one he was looking for. He brought it back over to the desk, and then opened it. He mumbled something Buffy couldn't understand until he found the page.

>
"What is it?" Buffy asked. From the way Giles was reacting, she couldn't really tell if this was a good thing or a bad thing, or a combination of both.

>
"Ah! Here it is...Azrael's Flame." he read, "'is the tool of a necromancer, a controller of the dead. It can be used in a variety of purposes, including those fire is traditionally utilized for, but also including forms of majik. Dreams or visions of the flame are the forerunner of the arrival of a necromancer. Several accounts of Azrael's Flame visions have been recorded, the most widespread and recent being in 1960 and 1981, the first being in London, England, and the latter taking place in Sunnydale, California.'"

>
"That's a pretty new book to have something that occurred in this century..." Buffy said in amazement. For the most part, things in the Giles books were dated by century, mostly in BC. An actual year in this century was an oddity.

>
"That would be because this is a Watcher's digest of 20th Century occult happenings. I acquired it New Years Eve last year from a friend in the Watcher's Council who still likes me."

>
"Oh." Buffy let it soak in, then remembered her other question, "Giles, what's a necromancer? And why did one visit here in 1981?"

>
"A necromancer" Giles explained, "is a person born with the ability to raise the dead and maintain control over them. They have a certain power over vampires, and for some reason, they seem to gravitate towards Slayers, despite the lack of demonic or hell-related abilities."

>
"What do you mean, 'lack of demonic or hell-related abilities'?" Buffy exclaimed, "They can raise and control the deceased, not to mention a power over vampires! I'd call that demonic!"

>
"Calm down, Buffy..." Giles soothed, "Firstly, a necromancer is not necessarily a bad person. They have a soul. They were born that way, as you were, and necromancers are almost as rare as Slayers. There are only 3 or less alive at a time. Secondly, that power is over the dead, not demons, and the control over vampires comes from the fact that a vampire is technically dead."

>
"Okay, but back to my second question. Why did one visit in 1981? And why is one visiting now?"

>
"I believe that last bit wasn't in your original question, but I will give my conjecture on both."

>
"Okay"

>
"There is a theory which has been put forth by a few of my colleagues that states that the more widespread visions foretell not the arrival of a necromancer, but the birth of one. Would you say that the man in your dream could have been born in 1960?"

>
Buffy thought back and brought the image of the old man into her mind's eye. "Yeah, that seems about right..."

>
"1960, if you don't remember, is the year of that other widespread occurrence in London, where, no doubt, the man from your dreams was born." Giles ended.

>
"So that means that you think that another necromancer was born here, in 1981?" Buffy asked, her mind doing the math at the same time.

>
"That is exactly what I think. And that would mean that the necromancer, unless he or she has moved, was one of your graduating class."

>
"But, why would the vision be now? Why not all the time, if a necromancer has lived here all along?"

>
"Firstly, because you came here and they were already here. Secondly, because his power was not activated, most likely." Giles answered.

>
"Not activated?" Buffy asked.

>
"Yes" the Watcher answered, "A necromancer's powers are born with him, but to be activated, another necromancer must come within a certain range. I guess it is almost a self-defense measure..."

>
Buffy, who was thinking, suddenly looked up. "The other voice, the one who saved me! That's the other necromancer! I couldn't tell whose voice it was, but it wasn't old! It's the voice of the Sunnydale necromancer!"

>
Giles' eyebrows shot up. "Most likely...I didn't think of that... Go to class, Buffy. I'll do some research on necromancers so that we might be able to identify that helpful Sunnydale necromancer. I'll call you when I have something..."

>
Buffy nodded, then walked out.

>
"I wonder what he's doing right now?" Giles murmured as he began to dig into the books.

>

>
"Oh...dammit..." Xander moaned, waking up from his little palette in the graveyard. He'd rolled onto a fallen gravestone, and slept on it for most of the night. The result was a horrible back pain and a few scratches. Not bad, Xander though, at least a demon didn't find me.

>
"What the bloody hell are you doing here?" Came a familiarly annoying British voice from within one of the mausoleums.

>
"I jinxed it didn't I?" Xander asked himself under his breath before answering, "Well, I was trying to sleep..."

>
"Sleep?" came the voice again, incredulous, "Outside? In Sunnydale? In a graveyard?"

>
"Well, I made it through the night, didn't I?" Xander yelled back. He was permanently annoyed with Spike in the first place, and now the level of annoyance was rising, right along with anger and panic. He began to collect his things.

>
"Lucky little bastard..." Spike said with disgust, his face finally appearing in the doorway to the mausoleum, "If I hadn't-BLOODY HELL!"

>
Spike, who had been glaring at Xander, suddenly jumped back in complete terror. Xander, who was pretty much aggravated with the world, growled at him. "What?"

>
Spike didn't want to speak, but Xander could follow his eyes. Spike kept staring at his ear, or rather, just above it, then at his eyes. Xander could feel the irritation, and something else he couldn't really identify, rising.

>
"What is it!?"

>
"Look, chap. I'm real sorry about all the times I called you a loser, and how I tried to wreck your clothes, and all the times I tried to kill you and-"

>
"What's with the sudden apologies, Spike?" Xander asked, getting up. Spike cringed. "I didn't see any gypsies come by recently..."

>
"Look, chap, pal, buddy, friend, comadre, amigo-"

>
"What?" Xander asked, his anger mounting.

>
"Okay" Spike said, "Just promise me you won't make me a pet! I've seen that happen to a couple o' my old pals. That damn blue-eye had ole' Jonathon fetchin' him tea! It was bloody humiliating! I couldn't deal with that sort of rubbish! I just couldn't! I mean, I can't even bit anyone anymore! Don't make me a pet too!"

>
"Pet? Tea? What the hell are you talking about?" Xander growled. His back hurt and now his head was starting to itch from who knows what.

>
Spike was a bit shocked, but was able to ask, "You don't know?"

>
"Know what?" The young man asked, knowing that if he didn't release whatever was building up inside him soon, he would absolutely burst.

>
"What you are, you blasted numb-skull! Why your hair's turned white, why you're sleeping in a damned graveyard!"

>
"No I don't!" Xander yelled at him. As he did, though, he felt the whatever-it-was leave him, coursing through his body, out of his toes, and into the ground. When it left, Xander calmed. "Now, Spike, what exactly are you talking about?"

>
Spike nearly smiled, but thought better of it. "What I was talkin' about was the fact that you're a-"

>
He didn't get to finish, because Xander interrupted him with a

shout of surprise. The ground beneath the young man's feet was moving violently, and as they watched, a figure covered in tattered clothing rose from the ground. Time had eaten away at the body, but they could tell it was female from the remaining pink cloth on it and the strands of dirty, rotted hair which hung limply from its skull. An eyeless skull seemed to take one look around, stare directly at Xander, stare at the sun, and then it disappeared in a puff of dust.

>
"Necromancer..."

>
"A what?" Xander asked. He seemed to be asking that a lot today, and considering today had just started, his level of cluelessness must have been higher than normal.

>
"A Necromancer, a raiser, an animator, a blue-eye," Spike rambled; then when he realized that Xander still had no idea what he was talking about, his expression turned to anger, and he shouted, "a person who makes dead people get up and do what he wants!"

>
"You mean I can raise the dead?" Xander asked nervously. Even as he said it, a little voice in his head answered him in the affirmative.

>
"Well" Spike answered simply, pointing at the mound of earth from which the now-dusted corpse had risen from.

>
"So, what? I was cursed? Or all this dealing with vampires has affected me in some way?"

>
"No, you bloody idiot..." Spike said, the condescending note back in his voice where it belonged, "You were born that way."

>
"Born that way?" Xander asked, recollecting his thoughts. They had tumbled out of order when the corpse had risen, "You mean, I'm like some kind of zombie-making freak of genetics!?"

>
"Not exactly, mate. There are only three of you people alive at a time. You're like a Slayer or somewhat...But different."

>
"'But different'!?" Xander exclaimed, "What the hell kind of help is that, Spike? It's like telling me that an elephant is like a squirrel...but different! What the hell am I?"

>
"I already told you!" Spike answered angrily, trying not to tick off the young animator, "You can raise the dead, you can make them do what you want, and you can use Death's Flame."

>
"Death's Flame?" Xander asked, getting more confused every time Spike answered him.

>
"Yeah, that blue fire that keeps on coming out of your fingers..." Spike pointed.

>
Xander looked down to his hand, which he had been drumming against his pants leg. He hadn't noticed before then, but flickering at the edge of his fingertips was a little blue flame. Xander yelped, yanked his hand away from his pants, and stared at it, as if it wasn't the same appendage he'd lived with all his life.

>
"It's been doing that for the last five minutes, since that thing rose, so if it could have done damage, it would have, you dolt..." Spike said lazily.

>
Xander's attention shifted from his hand to Spike, and the look of fear metamorphosised into one of haughtiness. "I wouldn't be so annoying, Spike. I didn't forget what you were saying before, about having a vampiric 'pet'. Sounds interesting..."

>
Spike's entire manner changed as he heard just how serious the young man was. Just as the vampire had no real allegiance to the Scooby gang, Xander had no good feelings toward Spike. Then he perked up.

>
"Yeah, but you don't know how!"

>
"I didn't know how to raise a corpse either..." Xander pointed out smugly. At the look of fear that crossed Spike's face, Xander smiled. "If you don't tell anyone what I am, I won't turn you into a 'pet' as you so wonderfully put it. Deal?"

>
"Deal." Responded the vampire. "But with those white streaks in your hair, and the eyes and all that other rubbish, don't you think they'll find out anyway?"

>
Xander smiled again, and then pulled out his pizza delivery hat. He put it on. "No streaks!"

>
"What about the flamey hand thing?"

>
"I'll just be careful..." Xander said, not knowing if he was trying to convince himself or the vampire.

>
"Superman has a more water-tight disguise, I'll have you know, mate."

>
Xander, who had been picking up his blanket roll, looked up at the British vampire. "You read comics?"

>
"Partial to X-men personally, but I read a bit of the classic stuff as well" Spike said, half to himself, "The Shadow was a good one... Always liked him. Not to mention the- Hey! What's so funny?"

>
"Just never figured you as a comic book guy...you know, one day, you and I gotta have a long conversation about comics. You collect?"

>
Spike snorted. "Of course! With a lifespan like mine, hell yeah! Not that I'd ever sell a one o' them..."

>
Xander gave Spike a look with a bit more respect in it than usual, and walked off towards home to get dressed for work.

>

>"Buffy? Buffy, this is Giles..."

>"Giles. Good. Any news on the necromancer?"

>"Well, not exactly, but I do have something. I looked up necromancers in every book I own, and from that, I was able to figure out some common traits and identifying marks which might help us to find the young man or woman who might be able to help us against the one who visited you."

>"Well?" Asked the Slayer over the phone line. Riley was sitting on the bed, waiting for her to finish getting ready for their date. He was doing hand movements and everything. They were a bit late for the reservation.

>"Yes, well, it seems that they share certain physical characteristics. While they can be male or female, they all have blue eyes, such as the one you saw, and black hair. Also, as you noticed in your dream, they possess bright white streaks at their temples. I'm looking for more, but hopefully what I have found so far will help you..."

>"Okay, Giles. Gotta go!"

>"Oh, um...okay... Good luck Buffy..."

>The click told Buffy she could hang up, and she was relieved to. But when she turned around, she found Riley befuddled and worried.

>"Necromancer? What necromancer? What's going on, Buffy?" he asked, trying his best not to sound like a soldier as he did.

>"Well, I had a dream, and the man in the dream might be a necromancer, so Giles did some research. Now, he's convinced that not only is one coming here, but that there's a necromancer already in Sunnydale and that he or she was one of my classmates."

>"Okay..." Riley answered. There is very little to say to a comment like that.

>"Anyway, he just told me what to look for on a necromancer- "

>"Big horns and scary teeth?" Riley asked with a smile.
>"No" Buffy answered with a bit of somberness, "Necromancers are human. Remember how I told you that every evil isn't necessarily demonic? This is one of those times..."
>"Oh" Riley said, a bit crestfallen.
>"Anyway, so far, Giles says to look for blue eyes, black hair. Maybe white streaks." Buffy said, walking over to the door.
>Riley looked up. "Do you want me to call it in, look through profiles?"
>"Not really" Buffy answered as he got up from her bed and they walked out, "You see, supposedly, the necromancer is only activated when another one comes by, so any changes in looks wouldn't be in the records. And it might have just happened."
>"Do you know the gender?"
>"No" Buffy answered, sighing, "Could be either..."
>"So, pretty much, you have nothing that could be looked up..." Riley said, obviously disappointed at not being able to help.
>"Well, he didn't say that those things would have been recent. I just thought of that because I'd never seen more than a few with that combination, and the specific one I'm thinking about couldn't possibly be it. So you could ask them to look up any Sunnydale residents from my graduating class that have blue eyes and black hair."
>"What about the white streaks?" Riley asked.
>"Well, I would have noticed that. It's not as common. Perhaps that's one of the changes they go through when they're activated."

>Riley then proceeded to call into the Initiative's headquarters. He quickly gave them the parameters of the search, and then tucked the small phone back into a hidden pocket in his outfit.

>"Alright, let's go..."
>And they did.
>
Back in the non-romantic world, Xander was sitting in his car, wondering just what was going to happen, not to mention what he was going to do about it. Should he tell the Scooby gang? How would he keep it from them anyway? And Anya...Would she understand or would she turn and run from him. He knew next to nothing about what he was, other than what he'd experienced and what Spike had told him, so how would he know what would give him away and what wouldn't? He couldn't go around raising corpses accidentally and have everyone look at him weird. Besides, he'd lose his job if he, or the pizzas, smelled like a dead body.
>So, he figured, I have to figure out how to control these...powers. Xander hadn't the slightest idea where to start, but soon came up with something. Giles, he guessed, had to have something on what he was. But, Xander reflected, he couldn't think of one way to get a book from the Watcher's library without incriminating himself. Then he remembered the majik shop which he had often driven Willow during their high school times. The man had been friendly, kind, and above all, quiet. He couldn't see that benevolent old man telling anyone anything, if there wasn't a good reason. Besides, the man had always been especially nice to him, asking him if he wanted anything and throwing in something extra whenever he picked up something for the Scooby's witch-in-training. It seemed Xander's best bet. He had a bit of time before he had to be at work, and he knew the shop was open, so he decided to stop by.
>When he walked in, the first thing he noticed was the strong aroma of spice in the air. Willow had told him long ago that the

owner was rather partial to incense, some kind of wood, she'd said. Well, whatever it was, it made Xander feel a little bit better. The young man, though still a smidge nervous, waved at the old gentleman at the corner, then proceeded to the back, where he knew the books were. The older gentleman followed Xander with his eyes, then put down the duster he had been using on the counter and did it physically.

>
Xander didn't see anything, at least not anything relevant. Not a single thing on what he wanted. So he was not unhappy to see the owner standing right behind him with a large grin on his face. Xander smiled back at him, then stood straight up.

>
"I, uh, can't seem to find anything about the, er...topic which I need" Xander asked nervously.

>
The old man looked into his eyes then, staring deep and hard, as if he was taking a measure of Xander's soul with that look. His face went blank for a moment, then the smile returned.

>
"Looking for something on...animation?"

>
"Ani-Oh, yeah...Animation. Yeah, you know me. Love Disney!" Xander said with a fake smile.

>
"Don't worry, young man. I knew who and what you were the moment you walked into my store with young Willow. I haven't said anything in all that time and won't say anything now that you seem to know. No need to worry. I'm an old friend of yours, though I doubt Ambrose has said anything about it..."

>
"You...You know my dad?" Xander asked, surprise written plainly on his face. Why would his dad know anyone like this man? His father hated anything remotely illogical or occult. The math in his head wasn't working out.

>
"Yes, I know Ambrose. He's become quite a wreck these days. Drunk more than not. Not much of a father, I know..." The old man looked pained as he said it. He looked into Xander's eyes with such compassion and concern, "Ambrose is not one to deal with such things, at least not anymore..."

>
Xander wanted to speak up. He wanted to defend his father against this old man who was saying things about his father. But the words stuck in his throat. They would be lies. His father was a bum. An alcoholic, abusive bum who didn't give a damn about anything, especially his son.

>
"Yes, I knew Ambrose when he was a bright young man in love. He had such joy. He couldn't wait to be a father. His green eyes would shine at the site of your mother, her belly round with child, her brown eyes sparkling in the sun behind a few strands of blonde hair. They were both so happy, so excited...Excited about you, Alexander..."

>
"Bull" Xander said coldly in a coarse whisper. He knew his parents didn't give a damn about him, and this old man was making him start to believe the lies. The lies that would come to him at night, as he lay in his bed and dreamed of happier times that didn't exist and probably never would. The lies that told him his parents really did love him, that they were just...he didn't even remember all the excuses he had made up.

>
The old man gave him a strange look, and then stared at him full in the face. "No, Xander. There was a time when you were the most precious thing in the world to them. They loved you more than their own lives. You know that Ambrose gave up a good job at an ad agency in L.A. so he could raise his family in a 'clean environment'? It was only when..."

>
"When what? When he saw what a colossal mistake I was, THEN he started to drink like a madman and beat my mother and I?" Xander asked angrily. He could feel his anger rising again, and familiar

tickle he wouldn't have recognized unless he'd had it before told him that his fingers were flickering with blue fire.

>
The old man blinked, then looked down at Xander's hand. Xander didn't look at it, though. He kept his eyes on the man.

>
"When you were four, you probably don't even remember..."

>
"What!"

>
"You raised your dog from the dead..."

>
"What?" Xander asked in total shock. Every trace of anger had left him. What the man had said had been too surprising to allow him to hold the anger.

>
"Your dog, Checkers, got hit by a car. He died on the way to the vet. You buried him in the backyard that day. It started to rain, but you stayed out there with Checkers. You were so young, but he was your friend. I don't know what was going on with you, but the next moment, a little nose appeared in the dirt. Then out came Checkers. You were so happy that you completely forgot the fact that he had been DEAD. You brought him in to your parents, smiling like you always did. Your mother began to scold you for being out in the rain, but then she started to scream when she saw the dog. Ambrose came then, and took Checkers. You never saw him again. You never remembered..."

>
Xander stood in total shock while the memories came rushing back to him. How could he forgotten? How could he forget that? He'd been so young... "How-how do you know all that?"

>
The old man looked near to tears. This poor boy had gone through so much, so very much for one so young. And it wasn't even his fault. It was something none of them, Ambrose, himself, Marie, Xander, could control. He put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Because, my young man, I am your Uncle Gerard..."

>
"Uncle?" Xander asked. He had gotten too many surprises today, and they had taken their toll. The boy was close to fainting.

>
"Yes...Uncle. As in, brother to your father..." the old man said softly.

>
"My...uncle..." Xander said slowly, assimilating the information.

>
"Yes. Your uncle, Xander."

>
"How." It was something between a question and a statement of disbelief.

>
"Well, your father and I had the same mother and father...but if you're asking why you never knew that, it's because of the dog incident."

>
"Why?" Xander hadn't gotten up to complicated sentences. His brain was too busy working on keeping him upright and alive.

>
"I was...It was supposed to be MY child that got the gift. He'd worked it out so carefully, checking the dates and the family records. He was all set for a normal life. He even took his wife's name, Harris, to get away from the family."

>
"So..."

>
"When he saw the blue eyes and the black hair, he got scared and upset. He told me never to mention anything of my work or such to you, that he didn't want his child influenced by the very thing he was trying to shield his family from...but you grew, and he began to hope that perhaps you were just a normal boy. That his boy HADN'T got the gift. But every hope he had for a normal life was crushed the moment you brought in that dog..."

>
"You mean?"

>
"Yes, my boy. It's a family thing. Necromancers and other such

things...they're part of being a LaVelle. Every third generation gets one with your talent, and the rest of us have respectable abilities all our own."

>
"What's yours?" Xander asked, trying to go bit by bit.

>
"I have a flair for spells, specifically Transformation spells." Said Gerard with a bit of pride.

>
"And Dad?"

>
"He was the finest at Protection spells, if I recall. At least I think so... That might have been your Aunt Myrtle..."

>
"Aunt Myrtle?" Xander repeated questioningly. The idea of his aunt doing anything other than flirting with his other relatives' dates at the family Christmas party was unusual to say the least.

>
"No, no... Myrtle was best at Glamours. It was your father who did the Protection spells. They're all around your house, you know. And Willow's... Once you started being friends with her, he did a few circles at her house to make sure she was okay also. Finest spell work in this damn town, if I may say so... 'If you need a good spell, ask for LaVelle!'"

>
"I think I'm going to be sick..." Xander said suddenly. This was too much. He had dealt with more demons than the majority of people his age, but some newly discovered relation talking about his family's magical talents like they were bowling scores was too much after the whole 'necromancer' thing.

>
"Easy boy, easy..." Gerard said soothingly as he eased his nephew to a seat, "I know it's a little much to take in all at once, but it's your family..."

>
"And my father...?" Xander asked after a minute of simply absorbing all that had been told to him, "Why did he..."

>
"Why did he become such a piece-of-crap drunk?" Gerard asked softly.

>
"Yeah...why?"

>
"Because he found out what kind of a town this was, because he wasn't sure about what you might raise, because he was 35 years old, completely confused and grief-stricken, and he had refused the only family he had when he needed them the most then..."

>
"Bastard..." Xander said through clenched teeth, "Lousy, rotten, filthy, cowardly bastard..."

>
"No, Xander. I thought so at first, but you must understand how dangerous it is to be what you are...He was just-"

>
"What? Worried?" Xander asked, using the anger to bowl over his other emotions to a tolerable level, "He didn't want anything to hurt me, so he could do a better job of it?"

>
"No, he-"

>
"Don't. Okay, just don't. You haven't lived with him like that for 18 years of your life. You haven't suffered mental and physical abuse from his hands. You haven't lived your life in fear of your father because he was a Goddamned coward and hated you for something you couldn't prevent. So don't tell me it's not his fault, all right?"

>
The old man could see the fire in his eyes, the pain the boy was in, and how much it cost him to say what he was saying out loud. Xander had always hidden his pain. It was so much easier to laugh at himself than deal with what he had at home. And now he was telling off the only family member who seemed to give a damn about him. Xander felt like screaming.

>
"I wasn't going to say that, Xander..." his uncle said slowly, "I was only going to tell you that there was a time when you were everything to him. When he wasn't stuck so far inside the bottle that

the only time he crawled out was to get into another one. And that, if you tell him...tell him everything on everything about everything...well, maybe you can bring him back."

>
"Bring him back?"

>
"Yes. Tell him about your friends. Tell him the good work you've done, are still doing. Tell him just who and what your friends are. What your girlfriend is...Show him that denying the problem or drowning it in booze only makes the trouble grow. Show him that you're going to be all right."

>
"But -"

>
Gerard looked him straight in the face as he said it, but the gentleness in his voice was plain. "He was a good man, Alexander. Show him the way to be one again. Show him how to be what he should. Show him you still love him, despite what he did to you, because I know you do, my boy. The passion in your tone told me. You still love him; show him how to love you..."

>
And with that, his uncle handed him a large wooden case, ushered him out, and closed the door.

>
"Lord and Lady, help that child. He's a good boy...let him find his father in that old drunk. Let him

>find a family again..."

>
Xander looked back at the glass door that his newly discovered uncle had just pushed him out of. Gerard was still at the door, staring after him with such a look on his face, Xander couldn't even describe it. It was something between sadness and hope. The young animator switched that large case to his one hand and waved. His uncle, looking a bit distracted, waved back.

>
It was then, as he headed back to his car, that he started to wonder what the case was. Gerard had taken it out after Xander had nearly fainted, and had been fingering it nervously during the rest of the conversation. Despite it's size, Xander found it to be quite light, and he had no problem carrying it to his car.

>
As soon as he loaded everything in, Xander started up the car and drove home. He still had a couple hours till he was supposed to start his job, and he wanted to examine the case, and whatever it held, in privacy.

>
He entered his little abode and plopped down on the bed with the large case. He'd noticed it had a slight tingle to it. Xander didn't know why but he planned to find out. Still on the bed, he flipped open the clasps and pulled open the case.

>
He figured out what the tingling was as soon as he opened it. It had to be some sort of spell to make the case light, because, with the amount of heavy items in there, there was no way it could be as light as it was. The entire left side was covered in little compartments, filled with all sorts of labeled ingredients for who knows what. The other side was like a little shelf, and it was filled with at least twenty small leather-bound books.

>
Xander didn't want to mess with whatever was in the containers, but the books were definitely what Xander wanted. He pulled the one on the top left and looked it over. The little book was about 5 inches tall, an inch thick, and covered in black leather. Gold engraving told him the name of the volume.

>
"The Arts of Necromancy" Xander read with a smile. This was exactly what he needed. His mind went back to his uncle in the store. He hadn't even charged him. Xander made a mental note to thank Uncle Gerard next time he went in for Willow or, he thought with a smile, himself. But thoughts of the kind man reminded him of what had been said about his own father. Xander's mind boggled at the very idea of talking to his father. The only thing he did know was that he had to surprise his old man, and make sure he was strong enough to take

anything the old bastard threw at him, magic, punches, or cutting comments.

>
And with a zeal born of desperation, Xander began to read the books.

>

>"Yes...yes...yes, I understand...yes." Riley said into the cell phone as Buffy watched anxiously.

>"What? You understand what?" Buffy asked apprehensively. She didn't get Slayer dreams very often, and usually they meant trouble. Real trouble.

>"Well" Riley said as he closed the cell phone and tucked it into his pocket, "We have three names that match the blue eyes, black hair, and the right graduation class."

>"Names?"

>"Myra Robbins."

>"Not. The voice I heard was distinctly male..."

>"Why didn't you tell me that before?" Riley asked, more than a little aggravated. At Buffy's shrug of apology, he said the next name.

>"Nicholas Addams."

>"Maybe. He was awful weird all year. It's a possibility..."

>"And Alexander Harris."

>"Do I even have to dignify that with an answer? I mean, think of it... Xander, animator of the dead. Doesn't work in your mind either, does it?" Buffy said with a smile.

>"Not really," Riley answered, "But sometimes, people can surprise you."

>"Xander?" Buffy asked with something close to shock, "Not Xander. Xander is Xander is Xander. I've seen paper towels with more complication to them..."

>"I'm just saying..." Riley argued, "Sometimes people are a lot more complicated and bizarre than anyone could ever guess. I mean, ever in your wildest dreams did you think that I was working for the Initiative before that day in the clock tower?"

>"No" Buffy admitted, "But you're you...and Xander is Xander. I've known him since I came here, and Willow has known him since they were three."

>"Just don't count someone out too quickly" Riley said, "And never judge a book by its cover..."

>"Sorry, Riley. With Xander, what you see is what you got..."

>
Ambrose Harris, who was in truth Ambrose LaVelle, was drunk. In fact, he was very drunk. It wasn't unusual for him to be drunk. It was pretty common, actually. If it was any more common, he could probably mark it off on the calendar. He knew Drunkenness, and it's less pleasant friend The Hangover, like the back of his hand. Then again that was looking a little blurry at the moment to Ambrose, so that might not be the best of comparisons.

>
As far as he knew, he was alone. His wife, Marie, who was more of an irritation than anything else, was at her 2nd job, and his no-good son was also at his ever-so illustrious job as pizza delivery guy. Not that Ambrose had a finer job. He pretty much wrote dull copy at a local ad agency.

>
Of course, Xander wasn't actually at work. He was downstairs reading up on how to raise the dead and other things that were part of his newly discovered powers. Though Ambrose had no idea, Xander was already up to the 4th chapter in the 9th volume. All of the experiments had worked perfectly, and while Xander was proud of himself, the repercussions had made a bit of noise during the last

three ones. Not that Ambrose noticed. He would have barely noticed a train running through his living room.

>
But for some reason, he noticed the phone, which was ringing. Ambrose, damning the phone and the caller, nonetheless went over and answered it. The voice that spoke to him as he did sobered him like nothing else could.

>
"Hello, little brother..." said Gerard, "We have to talk. Now..."

>
Ambrose's sunken eyes seemed to bulge, and the tremors in his hands got worse. "What do you want? I thought I told all of you to leave me alone!"

>
"Leave you alone?" his older brother yelled over the phone line, his voice strained with anger and disbelief, "Leave you alone! You expect me to leave you alone when you are doing irreversible and unnecessary damage to my flesh and blood because you wanted some damned privacy? When the boy's struggling with his powers like a duckling in water"

>
"What the hell are you talking about!?" Xander's father roared, "It's my damned business what goes on in my family, and if the Family found out about you meeting with Alexander when I strictly forbid it, you'd b-"

>
"I'd be nothing" Gerard said in a firm, calm voice, "The boy came to my store and asked for my help. He got the marks and didn't know where to go, and I helped him. And the Family fully supports me."

>
"What do you mean, the Family supports you?" Ambrose yelled angrily.

>
"I received permission from all of the Family. We've seen what you have let your life become, how you have tarnished your name and irrevocably damaged the family which you proclaim you only want to protect. We gave you time, Ambrose. We gave you 15 years. You haven't fixed it, and now I will. Unless you clean up within the week, Xander will be moved to my house to stay with me."

>
"Hell no!"

>
The voice grew colder then it had been before, and carried an edge, which Ambrose found vaguely frightening. "And if you dare harm on hair on that child, brother, I will personally make sure that you never, ever do it again. In the most painful way possible..."

>
"You can't do that!" Ambrose cried, angry and alarmed.

>
"Yes I can. I could come get him right now, but I wanted to see if you could fix things with the boy. He still loves you, Ambrose..." Gerard's voice grew softer, "He loves you so much, despite all you've done to make him hate you. You have and can hurt him like no one else, brother, because of who you are to him. But understand that if you screw it up again, I will see him get revenge instead of his father."

>
"Fine" Ambrose answered gruffly, knowing that no matter what, he had to do what was told to him.

>
"This isn't playing, Ambrose..." his brother said, the softness turning to urgency, "There's a Brondstaff coming to town."

>
"A Brondstaff?" Ambrose asked, surprised, " A Brondstaff necromancer is coming to Sunnydale?"

>
"Yes, Ambrose. He wants to test himself against the Slayer and the LaVelle animator..."

>
"Dear God..." Ambrose said with horror.

>
"Yes." Gerard said coldly, "And he has no training whatsoever, the poor boy..."

>
Finally, something else computed into Ambrose's still slightly

off brain. "Slayer?"

>
"Dear Goddess, you really have been lost for the last decade and a half, haven't you?"

>
Ambrose didn't answer. To think, he'd been so damned ignorant that he didn't know that the Slayer was in Sunnydale.

>
"Who?" Ambrose asked, rubbing his brow with his other hand.

>
"Buffy Summers, though goodness knows that you don't deserve the information..."

>
"Buffy? That blonde little friend of Alexander's? That's the Slayer?" The younger asked with skepticism.

>
"Yes, you damned ass! Don't you realize anything!? Xander has been fighting for the last 3 or 4 years besides the Slayer, doing all those things you claimed you never wanted him to get involved with...without his powers, without training, without a safety net..." Gerard's voice had grown heated as he spoke from discovering just how clueless his brother was to the world.

>
"God..." Ambrose didn't even have any other words to say.

>
"Yes. You had better pray! That boy has nearly died more times than I can count because you wouldn't tell him what he was, who he was, that he had a whole family who was ready to help!" The heat had risen till Gerard was shouting into the phone, but Ambrose didn't move the receiver.

>
"I will do what you asked..." Ambrose said with something near shock.

>
"Good." After Gerard's last word, the phone clicked to tell Ambrose that his brother had hung up.

>
"Dear Lord," Ambrose said to himself after putting down the phone, his voice and body shaking with the truth of what he had become and what he had done to his son, "Dear Lord..."

>

>The thumping on the stairs told Xander that someone was coming, and the slightly irregular step told him the unpleasant identity of the person coming. It was his father.

>Muttering several exclamations, which would have made Willow blush red, Xander quickly collected his new things and packed them back into the case, which he promptly stuffed underneath his bed, an area that was already over crowded. However, Xander realized as his father stared from the steps, he had forgotten to hide one exceedingly essential thing.

>A large ball of dark blue flame swirled two feet above Xander's head. Xander looked up and yelped at the sight of it, hoping that his father would believe whatever bull he came up with to explain it. But before he could say a word, his father stopped gaping and finished his way down the steps.

>Xander made his way slowly to the area of his humble abode that was farthest from the stairs, then opened his mouth to speak. However, his old man raised a hand in a quiet demand for silence, to which Xander willingly listened.

>"That's a-a" the old man stuttered from the awkwardness of the situation, "That's an awful nice ball of fire, Xander. You've got a lot of talent for your first day..."

>Xander couldn't talk. He couldn't say a word. The young man had never found himself in such a situation. Whether it was a joke, an exclamation of pain, or a simple statement, Xander LaVelle Harris always had something to say, even if it was stupid and pointless. Now, he had nothing...

>"Yes, even Great-grandfather Lewis couldn't do that on his first day. At least not one of that size. Yes, my boy, you do have quite a

gift..." Ambrose said as he shambled farther into the room.

>Finally, Xander's tongue and mind returned to this reality, and he chuckled softly in a way that wasn't in the least funny. "I raised a corpse this morning too..." he said in a strangled tone.

>His father gave him a strange look, which changed quickly into one that was something of a mix between pride and shame. "Been sleeping in the graveyard, have you?"

>"Yeah" replied Xander in a neutral tone, "Started about a week or so ago. Don't worry, I was quiet about it and everything...Don't want to wreck the family name...Or did you do that already?"

>The last was said angrily, and unknown to Xander, his eyes flashed like the blue flame above his head. Ambrose was startled for a moment, and then his expression showed grim resolve. He was not going to screw this up again. No longer.

>"I have, haven't I?" Ambrose said tiredly, sitting on Xander's unmade bed, "I shot this branch of the LaVelle's straight to hell with my boozing and abuse..."

>"Well, " Xander said non-committally, "I've seen the mouth of hell, and well, it was a lot worse, so I don't quite know about that." Xander paused and thought for a moment, then added, "But you got us pretty damned close to that..."

>The two men stared at one another, the elder's eyes bloodshot and filled with remorse and fear, the younger's blue and filled with anger, anxiety, and fire. They remained like that for a moment, watching one another. It seemed as if time stilled for the two, as if the universe was holding its breath to see what would happen.

Finally, Xander broke the moment.

>"Goddamn it, Dad!" He yelled in frustration, banging his fist into the desk hard, "Why didn't you tell me? Why did you do this!? Why, Dad? Why!? Why have you made my life a living hell for something I couldn't control?! Why didn't you tell me why I was sleeping in a graveyard? Why didn't you tell me what happened to Checkers? What was so frickin' important that you had to do this to me!? What, Dad!?

What!?"

>Ambrose looked at his son. His wonderful, brave son. His son, who had faced demons and vampires and monsters without any sort of defense just because he knew it was the right thing to do. This amazing, tolerant, kind, funny, compassionate, patient boy. His son, who still loved him despite all the effort Ambrose had put to making him hate his old man. His son who was noble, and better than anyone gave him credit for. His son, who had learned all by himself to be all the things that Ambrose never was and never would be. His son, whom he had abused for 15 years in heart, mind and soul. Ambrose couldn't speak for a moment, and even when his voice returned, it was as soft as a whisper.

>"You."

>"Me?" The boy said slowly, "Me... You abused the hell out of me for 15 years to help...me?"

>Before Ambrose could explain, Xander went on, the voice cold and mocking. "Where'd you get THAT bottle, Dad? I'm sure Giles would love have one for himself... If it's strong enough for...well, then it could probably kill a vampire at one whiff."

>"But, you don't understand!" Ambrose cried, "Being what you are, being who you are, it's-"
>"What?" Xander asked, his rage unparrelled to any before, "dangerous? Well, you know what's even more dangerous, Dad? Hunting vampires, saving the world, stopping the hellmouth from opening when you can't even use the only gift your father has ever given you because you don't even know about it? No. You want to know what scares me the

most, Dad. What has made me wake up in cold sweats when I fall asleep while researching in the library? The thought of coming home to face a father who wishes I was never born!"

>"Dear God, Alexander-

>"Don't call me that!" Xander cried angrily, "My name is Xander! XANDER! Everyone has called me that since I was 5, but you wouldn't know that, would you?"

>"No," Ambrose sighed, looking even more tired than he had before, "No, I didn't."

>Neither spoke for a moment, then Xander picked up the case beneath his bed. He was going to leave. But before he could, Ambrose spoke.

>"I can't take back what I did, Xander" he said quietly, his voice defeated and full of grief, "I can only try to learn from my mistakes, all million of them. And I can try to be what I should have been for 15 years. I can try to be a father again. But only if you want it, my boy, only if you want. Otherwise, you'll be staying with your Uncle Gerard and his family. It's your choice, but know that I am so deeply sorry about what I did to you. I was...I don't even know what I was, what I have remained as. I had my whole world flipped upside down in a second, and unlike you, I couldn't deal with it. I can never make up for what I did, but if you could find it in your heart to give me a chance, I'd sure as hell try. You have till Friday to decide. Do what you want. Do whatever you want."

>Xander looked at his father a moment more, then seemed to make a decision. He picked up the case, and walked out. Ambrose watched his back as he left until he could no longer see his son, then began to weep for all the pain he knew he deserved...

>
Xander was tired. He was tired, and sore, angry, and overjoyed, and confused. Mostly, he was confused. And tired. So much had happened in the last two days. In the amount of time that most people take to spend time with their families, Xander had found out that he had a large one that he had never even known about. Not to mention that little 'I-can-raise-the-dead" thing, which he had been learning was so much more complicated than it had sounded. But not much.

>
And now he had to choose whether he wanted to stay with his father, or go and live with his newly found Uncle Gerard. Xander had despised his father ever since he had begun boozing 15 years ago, but during the talk he'd had, he had sensed something in the drunken old man. His father had meant every word, even about being sorry. He couldn't remember how long he'd waited to hear his father say those words. And now they'd been said. But Xander wondered if it had been too long to fix it. He was so confused.

>
He didn't know what to do, whom to turn to now. He couldn't go home, he couldn't talk to his friends, because they didn't know about what and who he was. And he couldn't talk to Anya, because he wasn't sure if she'd be helpful or hurtful. But if he didn't talk to someone, he'd go nuts.

>
He found his answer in his pants, or rather, his pants' pocket. It was a little card, with some writing and a strange lobster-like symbol on it. Xander was digging for change when he found it and nearly tossed it, but when he read the writing, he knew it was a blessing.

>
Xander, his case in tow, made his way to a well-lit pay phone, put in the change, and dialed. It rang once, and then a familiar voice came over the phone.

>
"Hello! Angel Investigations! We help the hopeless!"

>
"Cordy!" Xander said, relieved, "It's me, Xander! Can I talk to

your boss?"

>
"Xander?" she asked in surprise, "Yeah, but if you hurt him or anything, I'll beat you to death with a shoe!"

>
"Okay..." Xander said patiently, "I promise. No nasty comments, no bad jokes, no sticking a stake through the phone line..."

>
"Fine"

>
There was a pause for a few moments, then Xander could hear the phone pass hands.

>
"Xander?" Asked Angel. He had no idea why the teen would want to talk to him, at least about anything civil. Or nonapocalyptic...

>
"Yeah, it's me." Xander said, "Listen, do you happen to know anything about a family called LaVelle?"

>
There was a long whistle across the phone line. "Oh man, you're in a mess? With a LaVelle?"

>
"No, but could you like tell me about them?"

>
"What's there to tell?" Angel answered, "They're one of the Three Families of Majik."

>
"Whoa, that sounded like it is meant to be all caps..." Xander exclaimed, "Are they that serious?"

>
"I should say so..." the vampire said, "Anyone who lives over a hundred knows about them. Pretty much, the main rule is not to tick them off. IE, don't kill one of them. Members have a magical talent, not to mention the... well, just avoid them... Especially the LaVelles. They're the most powerful of the Three."

>
"Three?"

>
"Yeah, Three. The LaVelles, the Brondstaffs, and the Kumaris, though the Kumaris only have one surviving member..."

>
"Brondstaffs?"

>
"Yes. Don't like the LaVelles at all. In fact, as I recall hearing, the Brondstaff's necromancer is heading into Sunnydale. Heard he wants to try his luck against the Slayer..."

>
"You don't sound very concerned..." Xander said.

>
"She can handle it..." Angel said with a shrug in his voice, "Besides, she's not his main focus. He's there to see the LaVelle necromancer, who's supposed to be on the Hellmouth. Wants to kill him."

>
"Reeeealy?" Xander asked slowly, a pit forming in his stomach.

>
"Yeah, I don't..." Angel stopped for a moment, "Xander? Wait a minute, if you aren't in trouble with the LaVelles, what made you ask about all this?"

>
"Well, uh.." the young man stammered, not wanting to let on.

>
"Oh god...Xander, are you a LaVelle?" Angel sounded very surprised, not to mention worried.

>
"Yeah, Deadboy," Xander replied, beginning to pull the phone away, "And I got the third generation mother load!"

>
Before Angel could respond, Xander hung up the phone. Meanwhile, in LA, Angel put down the phone in shock, then went over to the bookcase. He pulled out a book, then skimmed through till he found what he was looking for. He read carefully, and then put the book down.

>
"Angel?" Cordelia asked, concerned.

>
Then Angel did the closest thing to a yelp he'd ever done. Part joy and part terror...

>

>Back in Sunnydale, Xander began to go over things in his mind.

Someone, another necromancer, with full experience, was coming to kill him. Oh crap...

>He began to walk back to his car, his case dragging behind him, when he saw, or rather, felt, a large group of vampires attacking someone. And in the center of the group, fighting for all she was worth, was a blinding sun to his magical senses. The slayer. Buffy.

>Xander threw up a ball of flame to get a better view and draw attention. The vampires all turned towards him as he made a complex symbol in the air, then touched his fingers to his heart.

>As he did, he began to run towards the vamps, only dropping his case when he started to fight. And his fighting was amazing. He went faster than any eye could see, staking vamps left and right. Buffy watched in amazement. He killed all of them but one, and then went over to the girl who had been attacked. There, he made another strange hand sign, mumbled something strange, then touched her heart.

>The body which had looked near death, suddenly breathed in, and Xander turned to the remaining vamp and grabbed him close. Putting every ounce of power he had left, Xander commanded the vamp.

>"Take her to the hospital, then stake yourself..."

>The vamp nodded reluctantly, and took the extra stake Xander handed it.

>"Yes sir."

>The vamp, to Buffy's shock, did as Xander commanded, and picked up the girl.

>Xander looked at Buffy and looked as if he was going to try to explain all the weird crap he had just pulled, but he collapsed before he could.

>As he fell, the large blue flame went out, leaving Buffy in the dark truly and figuratively.

>
"Giles!"

>
The Slayer's shrill cry cut straight through the Watcher's door and right into his ears. Though he had been half-asleep at the time with his head wedged in a book, he immediately jumped up and opened the door.

>
The sight that greeted him as the door swung open was rather surprising, though considering they were on the hellmouth, it shouldn't have been. Buffy was carrying Xander, who was knocked out. She looked tired and worried, and obviously had held the boy up for a decent amount of time. In one of her hands she gripped the handle of a large ebony case, which she had obviously been dragging as well.

>
Giles, after recovering from the shock, stopped over and took the boy off of the Slayer's shoulders. Buffy sighed in relief, then walked in, bringing the case in with her. Giles, now weighed down, walked in right after.

>
The Watcher placed Xander on the couch, the still form ungracefully covering the couch. Then he sat down in a chair across from Buffy. He could see now just how tired she was. Tired and upset. She probably had a reason to be so, and Giles was concerned. He wondered if she had finally met up with the man in her dreams. So he asked.

>
"No, Giles, nothing like that" the Slayer said, waving his concern aside, "But, Giles, I just saw something really weird. You see, I was walking home when I saw this vampire attack a girl. I went in, but as we started to fight, a whole bunch of vampires jumped out. I was about to grab the girl and run, but then I see this odd light. All the vamps turned toward it, and before I can even think, Xander is running towards us."

>
She paused for a moment, as if wondering if Giles would believe this part.

>
"I've never seen anyone move like that, Giles. He was so fast. In less than a minute, he had staked everyone one of them, except this one. Then he did something really weird. He went over to the girl, who I thought for sure was a goner. He made these creepy symbols in the air, mumbled something, then pressed his fingers to the girl's chest. The second he touched her, I saw her breath..."

>
"Then he grabbed the last vamp and commanded, COMMANDED the vamp to take the girl to the hospital, then to stake itself. Xander even gave him a stake."

>
"And?"

>
"The vamp took the stake, said 'yes sir' then picked up the girl and ran off. I don't know how, Giles, but I know that that vamp was doing what Xander told him to... Then he turns to me, as if to explain, and faints dead out. As he hit the ground, the light went out. So I grabbed him, and this case he had with him, and dragged him here."

>
Giles stared blankly at his charge for a moment, then got up and walked to the bookshelf. He searched the shelves until he found the book he wanted the returned to his desk to look up whatever he wanted to look up. After skimming for a second, he stopped, read one passage over again, then nodded to himself.

>
"What?"

>
"It seems that Xander is a bit more knowledgeable than we thought. If what I read is right, he performed a binding spell on the young woman, effectively binding her soul to her body in order to keep her alive. As long as the soul is bound to the body like that, it can't die, no matter what the damage. There is still a chance for the body to be fixed as long as the soul is still within it. Also, if the soul is bound, it is impossible to become a vampire because the demon has no place to inhabit..."

>
"Okay...But Giles, if you know what he did, why do you still look worried?"

>
"Because" the Watcher explained, "binding spells are high level spells, one a normal novice shouldn't be able to do, let alone survive. And if it didn't kill him, it should have knocked him out for a day or so..."

>
"Giles?" Buffy replied, pointing to Xander's sleeping form, "He is out..."

>
"Yes," the Watcher responded, "however, at the rate he is regenerating his energy, he should be up within the hour. I mean, I am aware that the boy has always had an amazingly strong and powerful aura, however this shouldn't be possible..."

>
"Why not?" Buffy asked, her voice showing her concern.

>
"Because, if I'm right, he not only performed a binding spell, but a compulsion spell, a fire spell, and a transference spell. All at once. I'm surprised he isn't dead."

>
"Oh"

>
"He should be asleep for a week after that, maybe more, yet he'll be up in a few moments. Amazing..."

>
"Weird..."

>
"Yes, but amazing all the same..." Giles said.

>
"Do you think I should call the gang?" the Slayer asked, beginning to make her way to the kitchen phone. Giles stared at her blankly for a moment, then nodded.

>
"What are you, Xander Harris?" Giles asked himself under his breath, "What are you? How are you able to do what you did? Why did

you do it?"

>
Giles continued to stare at the young man, and as he did, he realized something. He hadn't set the boy down very comfortably. In fact, if the Watcher didn't move him, Xander would probably wake up with the worst backache he had ever had. So, sighing tiredly, Giles picked him up and carefully laid him out on the couch. But as he did, a small book slipped out of the boy's back pocket and knocked Giles' shoe.

>
"What on earth is this?" The Watcher asked himself.

>
"What is what?" Buffy inquired, walking over to where Giles was looking at the little leather bound book, "By the way, they'll be here in a few minutes..."

>
"Good...good..." Giles said, distracted, as he opened the mysterious thing. The librarian read for a moment, then closed the book. Then he got a puzzled look on his face and opened the book again. Smiling in a rather satisfied way, the Watcher again shut the book, only to regain that nonplussed expression.

>
"What is it, Giles?" the Slayer asked, obviously concerned.

>
"I can't remember a thing!"

>
"You have amnesia?"

>
"No..." Giles said tiredly, "I can't remember anything the second I close the book. I read it, and then, when my eyes leave the page, I completely forget what I read! It could be talking about fuzzy pink slippers for all I know!"

>
Buffy eyed her Watcher, then held out her hand. "Here, let me try. Maybe I'll be able to remember, being the Slayer and all..."

>
Giles looked skeptical, but he nonetheless handed over the little book to her. Smiling to herself, Buffy opened the book and read, and then closed it. Her mouth opened as if to speak, then shut abruptly. She repeated this a few times, and then threw the book back to Giles.

>
Before either of them could think about what the book could be, the doorbell rang. Buffy, eager to get out of the lecture on pride she knew she was going to get from her Watcher, immediately jumped to the door, and opened it.

>
Outside, Anya, Willow, Tara, and Riley waited impatiently, all very worried. The second they had gotten the call, Willow had started tittering anxiously. The redhead witch had asked her friend around seven times if she thought Xander was okay, to which Tara had shrugged. It wasn't that Tara didn't care about Xander; she thought he was really nice. But she had no idea what was going on. Anya was flipping out on levels that they hadn't made words for yet, and kept bouncing around. Riley, on the other hand, was simply stiff. He had his own suspicions about what had happened to Xander, but was willing to wait before he made any conclusions.

>
Buffy let them in immediately, and everyone took their seats. Anya looked about to jump on Xander, but the Slayer held her back so that the young man would be able to breath when he woke up. No one spoke. Buffy had told them all she knew over the phone, so all they could do was wait for Xander to wake up and explain everything.

>
They didn't wait long. Within a few minutes, a small groan was heard from the mass on the couch, then one of the boy's hands went to his forehead. The other hand pushed him up into a sitting position, and all watched to see what was going on.

>
"Oh man..." Xander moaned, "I won't be doing that again any time soon..." The boy then put both hands to his temples and began to rub. It took him a moment, but he finally realized that the hat he was

wearing was impeding his attempt to dull the pain, and promptly took it off.

>
"Xander, I agree that you won't be doing anything like that again for a while..." the Watcher began, "But we'd like to know just how you did it in the first place..."

>
Xander took a second away from dwelling on his pain to look at Giles confusedly, "I just did..."

>
"Yes, Xander..." Giles answered patiently, "We understand you did, but we were all wondering how you did it, considering you performed four spells at the same time, two of which were high level spells..."

>
Xander shook his head to clear it, then looked at the assembled group. "What are all of you doing here? And where's my trunk?"

>
"We were worried about you..." Willow answered quietly, "Buffy called us and told us what happened, and that you were asleep, and we all came over to see how you were..."

>
"And your trunk is in the corner over there." The Slayer told him, pointing it out, "Now explain!"

>
"Don't get nasty with me, Buffster..." Xander replied, getting aggravated as his headache got worse, "I've had a tough few days, all right?"

>
"Fine, but please, explain to all of us exactly how you did it..." Giles prodded.

>
"I said the words, did the gestures, and it happened..." Xander answered angrily, "That's how I did it. What, you don't think that Xander, dumb, normal Xander, can do anything right?"

>
"I did say that. I was just..."

>
"You didn't say it, but that's what you meant!" Xander cried furiously, "And how come you all don't give a crap about me until I do something weird? Do you have to be able to levitate a pencil or something to be a part of the Scooby Gang now!?"

>
"Not at all, Xander...I don't know why..."

>
"You know why!" the young man yelled heatedly, "You guys have forgotten all about me until now. You were all so concerned about your own damned lives, your college, your slaying, your witchcraft! You never cared what happened to me!"

>
"Yes, we..."

>
"No, you didn't..." Anya said, interrupting Buffy's defense of the group, "You really didn't. Xander is right. You've ignored him, and kept him out of the loop trying to keep him safe, and you forgot all about the fact that it's his choice!"

>
"Thank you..." Xander said, walking over to his girlfriend and hugging her tight, "Thank you for never forgetting me..."

>
The room went silent as they stood there hugging, so much so that Anya disengaged from Xander and asked "What's up with you people?"

>
Willow didn't have the words to speak, but instead pointed to Xander's temple. Anya looked to where the redhead witch was pointing, and promptly fainted.

>
"Anya?" Xander cried, going on his knee to check his girlfriend, "What's so..."

>
He realized where everyone was looking, then realized that he was no longer wearing his hat.

>
"Oh crap..."

>
"Told you so..." came a murmur from Riley.

>
"Don't even!" The Slayer yelled at her boyfriend. Then she turned back to Xander. "And you! Why didn't you tell us anything! We've been going mad trying to find the necromancer!"

>
"I didn't tell you..." Xander said, rolling his eyes, "Because I

didn't know..."

>
"What do you mean, you didn't know?" Buffy exclaimed, "How do you not know that you can raise the dead?"

>
"How did you not know you were the Slayer, way back in your LA years?" Xander answered with a sneer, "Same way I didn't know about what I could do...No one told me."

>
"But you have known for a while..." the Slayer accused, "Otherwise, how would you have known how to do what you did in that alley?"

>
"Buffster, I found out two days ago, all right?" He replied tiredly, "And since then, I've been studying...besides, it's been a rough two days..."

>
"What happened, Xander?" Willow asked.

>
"Well, I found out about a family I never knew I had, then my father tried to apologize earlier today..." Xander responded.

>
"Family?" Willow asked, "But you see your mother's family all the time, and your fathers...well, I thought you said they were all dead other than your Aunt Myrtle."

>
"No..." Xander replied, his voice slightly bitter, "Dad lied. They're not dead. They're just...well, odd."

>
"Odd?" Giles asked, wondering what in the world the boy would consider odd when he lived on the Hellmouth.

>
"Let me ask you this, G-man," Xander answered as he turned to the Watcher, "Have you ever heard of a family by the name of 'LaVelle'?"

>
Giles stared at Xander for a moment, then shook his head to clear it. "Of course I have! They are the most powerful of the Three Families..."

>
"Three Families?" asked the Slayer, completely lost.

>
"Yes..." The Watcher replied, taking off his glasses to clean them, "Three Families of Majik. The Kumaris, the Brondstiffs, and the LaVelles, the LaVelles being the strongest and most feared."

>
"Yes, but what do you mean by families of majik?" Willow asked.

>
"Every member has a specialty..." Tara explained before Giles could, "They...they operate similar to the mafia...they're really dangerous if you hurt one of them. I've read about two of them in one of my books, and my mother supposedly knew one, but I don't know much..."

>
"Which two?"

>
"The LaVelles are the ones mentioned the most, followed by the Brondstiffs. I've never heard of that other one..."

>
"Probably because they are almost gone..." Giles clarified, "The Kumaris have only one surviving member, as of now, and he is a rather weak young man."

>
"But" Buffy said, walking over to where Xander was, "What does that have to do with you?"

>
Xander chuckled under his breath, then looked at Willow, whose face had gone white. "Almost four years now, and you don't even know my middle name. Nice to know I have friends..."

>
"What does your middle name have to do with anything?" Giles asked, sounding defensive.

>
"It's what should be my last name, if my father hadn't tried to forget his family when he got married." Xander explained, "I'm Alexander LaVelle Harris..."

>
"You're one of these people?" Riley asked, breaking his silence.

>
"Yeah, I'm a LaVelle...and so is the guy who runs that majik shop you girls like so much..." Xander explained as he walked back over to where his girlfriend was sprawled on the floor, "He's my Uncle Gerard."

>
"Oh dear." Willow whimpered.

>
"Don't get upset, Willow..." he told his best friend as he picked up Anya, "He's a really great guy..."

>
"So, going back to the point," Buffy interrupted, "Xander, you're the necromancer, and there's another one coming to Sunnydale."

>
"Tell me something I don't know..." the young man replied as he placed Anya on to the couch that he himself had been on only a few minutes ago, "And the guy coming here is a Brondstaff out for my blood...yours too."

>
"You sound awful confident..." Riley said with a small snicker.

>
"That would be an act, commando boy..." Xander retorted, just as rudely, "You're familiar with that sort of thing, aren't you?"

>
"Hey, hey..." Willow yelled, getting up and going between the two young men, "We have an evil necromancer coming to town who wants to kill two of us! Let's not do his job for him!"

>
"Willow's right..." Giles said, rubbing his temples, "We can't fight amongst ourselves...we need to plan."

>
"What's there to plan?" Xander asked, sitting down beside Anya, "We go, we kick his ass, we come home, that's it!"

>
"Xander...could you do me a favor?" Giles asked tiredly.

>
"Yeah?"

>
"Make a ball of deadfire? Just a small one..."

>
"Sure..." the young man replied as he raised his hand to eye level. He stared at it for a second, muttered something, then a ball of very dark blue fire floated just above his hand.

>
"Xander?"

>
"Yeah?"

>
"Do you see that ball of deadfire there?" The Watcher asked.

>
"Yeah..."

>
"That, with a single touch, could knock any one of us out for a week, even at that size..." Giles told them all despairingly, "Now think of what a person with more experience could do to us with that sort of power..."

>
"Oh."

>
"But I thought you said Xander's family was the strongest." Buffy put in, "I mean, Xander's probably got more power in his little...thing...than that other dude..."

>
"Yes, Buffy, you are probably right..." Giles admitted, "But power is nothing if you don't know how to use it."

>
"But what about-"

>
The Slayer was interrupted by the sound of Giles' window breaking, and the cause of it landed at their feet a moment later. Xander quickly picked up the brick, then took off the note that had been attached to it.

>
"'Dearest Enemies,' he read out loud with dread, "'My name, as you have no doubt found, is Brondstaff. Nigel Brondstaff. And just as you have found out my name, I am sure you are aware of the purpose of my visit to your fine hamlet of Sunnydale. I am here, quite frankly, to kill the LaVelle boy, or rather to challenge him, though it's really the same thing said differently. I know the boy is completely

lost. He has no training, and has only recently discovered his powers, but I will challenge him to a formal duel nonetheless. The stakes are these. If I win, he will die, and I will kill the Slayer and her friends. If, in the unlikely event, he wins, I will most likely be dead, and if not, I will leave and never bother you again. Don't try anything funny. We will meet in the warehouse that stands in the southernmost area of this town tomorrow night at approximately 7:00 PM. Alone, as it should be. Till then, Nigel... Well, somebody has a bad case of being-an-overconfident-asshole syndrome..."

>
"I wouldn't say that exactly, Xander..." came a worried voice from the couch. Everyone turned around to see Anya sitting up, staring at her boyfriend. "I know the power a necromancer holds, and in a fair fight, he will kill you..."

>
"Then we need to make it an unfair fight..." Buffy said forcefully, "Giles, we need a plan."

>
The Watcher rolled his eyes. "That was what I was saying before..." he sighed, "now, Xander, you will meet him as he has said, except not alone, at least not truly alone. Buffy and Riley will follow you and take up positions near the top windows. Each of you will bring a crossbow and a tazer, and when he least expects it, you will distract him just enough for Xander to win..."

>
"Good plan." Xander said, "but he'll sense them if they set up too early. We need a word for me to shout for when they should go up to the windows..."

>
"How about 'bastard'?" Anya suggested, "He won't be surprised if you insult him..."

>
"Okay okay..." Xander agreed, nodding, "But in the meantime, I had better start studying so I have a chance..."

>
At this, Xander reached behind him to pull something from his back pocket, but when he found nothing, his eyes went wide. "Where's my..."

>
"Here, Xander..." Giles answered, handing him the small leather book, "We found it earlier while you were still out..."

>
"Thanks guys..." the boy said as he took the book, "And...I'm sorry for getting you all into this mess..."

>
"Not your fault..." Buffy told him, patting him on the shoulder, "And we're the ones who should be sorry. We were putting you aside, and..."

>
"No hard feelings, all right Buffster?" Xander said, giving her a crooked smile.

>
"None..."

>
"Then I had better get to work..."

>

>Xander's head hurt. He'd been studying his books for the last 4 hours non-stop, and the work was getting harder each time. Then again, it wasn't surprising, considering he was only three books away from the last in the case. As he studied, he carefully wrote down the more useful sounding spells and rituals in a small volume Giles had given him for just that purpose. It was a lot of work, but he knew that it was necessary.

>As he finished the 14th chapter, which was a rather engrossing bit on the maintenance of a vampiric servant, he heard someone walk over to him and sit down on the couch beside him. It was Willow.

>"Hey, Xander..." his lifelong friend said quietly, "How goes the studying?"

>"Hard" Xander admitted, "but...I get it. I get this stuff, no matter how complex, like nothing before."

>"Well, Xander, you are a necromancer," Willow reminded him, "you're supposed to be good at this stuff..."

>"Yeah..." the young man agreed tiredly, "But knowing my aptitude for most things, you'd think I would be an exception or something..."

>"Don't talk like that!" she admonished, shaking her finger at him, "You might not be the best at math and science-

>"And all the other things most people consider to be signs of intelligence-

>"But I know that you have a special something, Xander. A special intelligence, not to mention a good heart. And I'll have you know that there is no one I'd rather watch my back than you, Alexander LaVelle Harris..."

>The necromancer stared at her for a moment, then muttered loudly, "You didn't think that last year..."

>Willow looked surprised. "What do you mean, Xander? What happened last year?"

>"I know, Wil. I know all about it..."

>"About what?"

>"About the Hellmouth opening last year...when those female demons tried to open it in the library...the time no one told me about!"

>At first he had sounded sad, but the words had become progressively more filled with rage, until it turned into something close to a shout. Willow could see the flames in his eyes, caused by the anger, and it both frightened her and amazed her.

>"I don't know what you're talking about, Xander..." the redhead witch answered. She had tried to sound indignant, but the tittering in her voice betrayed her.

>The young man sighed tiredly, "Please...don't lie. I was there, Wil. I saw the whole thing, even if I was a bit busy at the time..."

>"Busy?"

>Xander let out a barking laugh. "Yeah, you wouldn't know about any of that, would you? Not that you ever asked me..."

>Willow's eyes showed her concern, "What happened, Xand?"

>"I had to deal with a bunch of leeching zombies who wanted to blow up the school lead by Jack O'Toole."

>"Jack O'To-? Zombies? Leeching?" Willow asked in confusion, "What on earth are you talking about?"

>"Well, let me explain." Xander began, "I was feeling pretty down due to my Jimmy-Olsenness, and I happened to tick off Jack O'Toole in the process of being really down, and then when I sort of stood up to him, he began to like me, and invited me to drive him around. I didn't want to deal with Katie-

>"Katie?"

>"His knife."

>"Oh."

>"Anyway, since I didn't want to deal with Katie, I did as he asked. Turned out he was a zombie, and he made me take him to the cemetery on Main to raise his buddies. Then, we went around and got stuff for the bomb, which alerted me to the fact that this was a bad bad situation. Eventually, I killed off O'Toole's buddies, got him to disable the bomb, which was below the library, and then left. I think Oz might have eaten him, but I'm not sure..."

>"Okay..." Willow said, still trying to absorb all Xander had told her. It was just so much unbelievable stuff. And he still hadn't explained one thing...

>"Didn't I hear you say something about 'leeching'?"

>Xander nodded, his anger forgotten as he explained everything, "You

see, as you should know, there are only two necromancers alive, and we are the only ones who can raise zombies. Jack O'Toole's grandfather, who raised Jack, and Jack himself, weren't necromancers...but they did have one in town, even if I didn't know it at the time. They used a spell that drew from my powers to do the raising. That's why O'Toole needed me to drive. He need my power to be closer to raise those dead for a long period of time."

>Willow was surprised at the fact that Xander had figured it all out, and her face showed it because Xander quickly finished by saying, "I read about a similar case around 8 books ago, so that's how I know..."

>The redhead witch nodded, then got a nonplussed expression on her face. "But what about that mask that created the zombies?"

>Xander chuckled under his breath. "You are a bright one, Wil. But as for that, I also know what happened. My anger activated the mask, which raised the zombies. It was the mask which created the things, and ruled them, but it used me as power source..."

>"Oh."

>Xander looked at the expression on her face, then sighed tiredly again. "I'm sorry, Wil. I didn't want to brag, it's just that it hurt when I saw that you were fighting that thing without me..."

>"No, Xander. We're the ones who should be sorry," Willow told him, her eyes filling with tears, "We forgot that you were a person. A person who has the right to chose what they want to do, and a person who needs support from their friends even when they try to cover their pain with laughter..."
The necromancer's eyes turned to the book once more, trying to stop any conversation Willow was trying to start.

>
"You mentioned your Dad before, Xander... What happened with you and him?"

>Xander's expression was odd, a mix of old sadness and uncertainty. "He apologized, Wil. He said he was sorry for all the things he's done, that he was so wrong for doing it, and that all he wanted to do was live a normal life...and despite all he's done to me, Wil, I want to believe him."

>"Oh, Xander!"

>"I know it's so dumb, but I still love him, Wil. I still want to have a father, even if he's done horrible things to me. I want to make up to him, but I'm so scared that it won't last. That he'll go back to being the old abusive asshole he's been for years..."

>Willow looked into his frightened eyes, then hugged him close.

>"I can only remember one thing from when he was good. Just one. I remember...we were at the playground, and he was trying to teach me to walk. I was having trouble, and I kept falling into the woodchips, but he just picked me up, gave me a kiss, and let me try again. I remember, I wanted so badly to do it right, I wanted to make him proud..."

>Xander's best friend looked down to see tears coming from his eyes, leaking out from behind his mask. She hugged him tighter, and he hugged her back, as if holding onto the redhead witch for dear life.

>"Oh god, Xander, I'm so sorry..." she whispered, nuzzling his jet black hair and allowing her own tears to flow.

>They just stayed like that for a moment, then Xander pulled away from his friend. He wiped the tears from her face, then his own.

>"Don't cry, Wil..."
>Willow laughed through her tears, then smiled at him. "Still taking care of me, aren't you Xander? You've always taken care of all of us...you've always been the shoulder to cry on, haven't you?"

>Xander grinned back, then gently pushed her away.
>"Come on, Willow..." he said, turning back to the books. Then, he looked at his watch. "We gotta go..."
>"Buffy! Riley!" he called down the stairs. Giles had let him study in the Watcher's own room so that Xander would have the privacy he needed.

>"Here!" came the reply.
>"All right, let's go!"
>"But Xander" Buffy yelled back, "It's a little early..."
>"I know..." Xander said as he descended the steps, Willow right behind him, "But the early bird catches the homicidal necromancer who's trying to kill him!"
>"Poor bird..." Willow whispered to Xander, making him smile.

>"Xander's right..." Riley agreed, "It would be better for everyone if we got there a bit early and had everything set up, instead of having to do it quickly. Besides, we might be able to surprise him..."
>"Yeah." Xander said. Actually, he was just really tired of being in the house, but he wouldn't let anyone else know that. "And maybe we can pick up some dinner on the way."
>"Dinner?" Buffy exclaimed in shock, "How can you eat when you are walking to your possible doom?"
>"Firstly," he replied calmly, looking straight into her eyes, "I can eat whenever. But secondly, and most importantly, I trust that my friend will help me, and that I'll win."
>Buffy gazed back, a little surprised at the power and the calm behind those eyes. "Well, I...I'll try to live up to that trust..."
>"You will..." Xander assured her, putting a hand on her shoulder, "I know you will."
>Then he averted his eyes and walked past, out the door. Buffy nodded to no one, then shook her head. She looked to Riley, who was giving her an odd sad smile, then at Willow, who she quickly walked over to.

>"What was all that about?" Buffy asked in a labored voice. She didn't know why she was out of breath, but she was.
>"It's staggering, isn't it?" Willow asked her quietly, "The trust he has in all of us, the love he has for each and every one of us. It's amazing, considering what we've done, what he's gone through..."

>"What has he gone through, Wil?" The Slayer asked, the concern in her tone blaring to the other girl, "He mentioned his dad..."

>"His father, if you didn't know, is a highly abusive drunk..." Willow informed her friend, "he constantly berates Xander about his failure, and never leaves him alone about what a loser he is...and sometimes, he hits Xander."
>"No..." Buffy gasped in disbelief, her heart breaking in two at her lack of knowledge about one of her best friends.
>"Yes." Willow told her, "It hasn't been that bad recently. His father hasn't hit him in a while, but the abuse is there. You can see it if you look hard enough. The slight sadness in his eyes, the odd note in his voice when he quips about how useless he is."

>"Oh god, Willow, I had no idea about any of this..."

>"He covers it well...there have been times when he came in all bruised and beaten-

>"Yeah, from a vampi- oh no, that can't have been..."

>The redhead witch nodded, and Buffy felt like crying her eyes out. But she didn't. It was the least she could do for her friend. She could hold back the tears and do what he needed her to do. But inside, she was crying. How could he have done what he had with that in his life? She didn't know where he found the...the courage. Her respect for her Xander-shaped friend went up by a lot. She'd never look at him the same.

>"That's how much he cares about us...about all of us. He hid his pain so we could deal with our own problems, and half the time he helped us solve those. He loves us all that much." Willow looked near to tears herself, and there was already some blurred eyeliner that told Buffy she had done so earlier.

>"And how do we repay him?" Buffy asked herself in a sarcastic tone, "We ignore him..."

>"Yeah, we haven't been very good friends recently, have we?"

>"No, my witchy friend, we have not..." Buffy agreed, "But now, I'm gonna change that. I'm gonna do what he asked me to, and we're all gonna celebrate, and then we're gonna have a little chat about the little Slayerette family..."

>"Just be careful, Buffy..." Willow warned, concerned about both of her friends. And Riley.

>The Slayer and the Witch hugged, then Buffy left out the door. Riley followed, carrying the crossbows that they would be using. Willow watched from the door as the three walked off, Riley and Xander on either side of Buffy.

>"Good luck, you guys..." Willow whispered to them. She made a little wave, then a small sign in the air to ward off evil from the group. When she turned, she saw Giles staring at her.

>"Very good..." the Watcher said, his voice not matching the words. He was obviously worried about the little group as well; Xander was the closest thing to a son he had, "Now, let's see what we can dig up about necromancers to help Xander a bit. I have a very good book, *Angrebalben's Encyclopedia Demonica*..."

>"I'll help too..." Tara put in.

>"And me!" Anya replied, coming in. She'd said her little 'good bye, good luck' while Buffy and Willow were talking, and was now anxious to do everything she could to help her boyfriend.

>"All right..." Giles exclaimed with mock enthusiasm, "let's hit the books..."

>
"So Xander, like, what exactly can you do?" Riley asked, his curiosity showing.
>
"Um, I can raise the dead, control them, and I can get a vampire to do exactly what I say-"
>
"'A' vampire?"
>
"Yup, just one." Xander admitted, "And I read somewhere that if you find the right one, they become bonded to you permanently and they become a Vampire Servant...that's with capital letters if you didn't hear it. I even read a prophesy in one of the books about a Servant and a Necromancer who would fall in love and bring an end to the Brondstaffs..."
>
"Think it could be you?" Buffy asked playfully.
>
"Nah, I don't go in for bloodsuckers..." he replied quickly, then he went on, "not that I have a problem with people who do...I mean, my taste hasn't been all that great either. Incan mummy, bug lady, Anya-"

>
"What's wrong with Anya?" Riley asked. He didn't really like the straightforward girl, but he didn't see anything wrong with her.

>
"Well," he hedged, not wanting to reveal Anya's past demonism, "I don't connect with her. There's no real LOVE. I mean, I do love her, but more like a sister, which makes sex really odd... Good but odd..."

>
"I don't want to know any more..." Buffy informed him. Riley nodded to let Xander know he agreed.

>
"But, back on the topic I asked about, what can you do?" the commando asked.

>
"Um, I can use the force of Azrael's Flame, in all it's forms-"

>
"Which are?" Buffy interrupted.

>
Xander faced both of them with an aggravated grin, "I'll tell if you two stop interrupting me..."

>
"All right, Xander." Buffy replied. She couldn't help it. The grin's aggravation also held a child-like joy in it that she could hear when he spoke. He was so excited about all that he could do, even if it was currently turning his life into a fiasco. And the thing that made her heart ache was that the joy was not that he could do the work, but that he could do it for them, the Scoobies, his friends.

>
"So, anyway, before I was so RUDELY interrupted, I was saying...there are three types of Flame which can be utilized by a Necromancer such as myself." Xander told them, sounding like a textbook, "Deadfire (dead as those I raise), Coldfire (cold as the icy breath of the Reaper), and Hotfire (hot as the fires of Hell, with which everyone here is familiar...), each of which being distinguishable due to their unique coloring..."

>
"Their coloring?" Riley asked, moving a little faster as he realized they had slowed before.

>
"Yeah..." Xander replied, stepping ahead of them and walking backwards so both of them could clearly see, "This" he made a small ball of light blue flames which was mostly white, "is Hotfire, which acts like normal fire except to me..."

>
The Hotfire disappeared, and was replaced by a flame with mostly blue, "This is coldfire. It can be used for light, and is harmless to everything and everyone. I've even played hackie sack with one of these little guys..."

>
Buffy and Riley stared at him. Only Alexander LaVelle Harris would think of using necromantic powers to play hackie sack. Riley grimaced as he thought of it, and Buffy smiled. That was her Xander!

>
Xander seemed to think about it, and then he asked Buffy, "Would you like to hold it?"

>
Buffy, startled at the question, looked him in the eyes, then nodded. She trusted him.

>
"Okay..." the young man replied, pulling her hand next to his own, "Now, just leave it there, and the little flame will..."

>
At his words, the small blue flame leapt from his hand to Buffy's. She jumped at the feel of the thing. It felt like velvet was running slowly over her hands. And it tickled just a bit. The Slayer pulled her hand up and she stared at the little ball of flame. It was so amazing, and so beautiful. She continued to watch it for a moment, and then her eyes went to Xander. He looked so happy. And she realized it was because she liked his creation. Her wonder at the flame made him smile so wide, she thought his face would crack. How she had ever allowed herself to forget him, she didn't know.

>
A second later she realized the flame was back in Xander's hand. She shook her head to clear it, and then watched as the young Necromancer looked to the commando and asked, "Would you like hold it?"

>
Riley made a motion to tell him that he didn't really want to touch the flame. "No thanks, but I'll touch it..."

>
"Go ahead." Xander replied, keeping his hand up so that Riley could touch the Coldfire.

>
"Neat." Was all Riley said.

>
In a second, the flame was gone and was replaced with a dark blue fire that was mostly black. "And this is Deadfire. It can, at this size, knock a normal person out for quite a while, and larger flames can kill. This was the one Giles had me show you..."

>
Riley and Buffy watched the little flame, wondering at it's power, and the power of it's creator.

>
"Freaky..." Buffy said, "But useful..."

>
"Yeah." Xander agreed, making the thing disappear as he turned back around, "There's more, but it's complicated, and not really important now...you don't have the time for me to fill you in on 24 books worth of material."

>
"You're right..." Riley answered, pointing to the building right in front of them, "Cause we're here..."

>
"Let's get set up."

>
"Good idea..." Xander said, pointing to the door, "And let's all go in to see the dimensions..."

>
Riley looked at Xander with shock plainly written on his face. The commando hadn't thought that Xander would even consider such things. When the young Necromancer turned, he saw it and told him, "Spent Halloween as a soldier. Long story..."

>
"Huh?"

>
Xander moved over and whispered conspiratorially in Riley's ears, "I'll tell it to you sometime...along with Buffy's outfit that night..."

>
Buffy turned on her old friend with a death-glare. "Xander, if you so much as think of telling him, I will!"

>
"'Is it a demon?' 'No, it's a car, Buffy...' " Xander quoted mockingly, yet good-naturedly, "I don't think I've ever laughed so hard..."

>
"You weren't even there, Mr. Tattle-tale," Buffy replied, the grumbling in her voice coming straight from her embarrassment.

>
Riley, who had watched the whole little argument, smiled slightly and asked, "Do I want to know?"

>
"No"

>
"Yes"

>
Riley sighed tiredly. "Come on, let's go in..."

>
The other two glared at each other for a minute, then allowed their frowns to become grins to let one another now they were kidding. Then they followed the commando.

>
As they opened the doors, the three noticed something disturbing and problematic. Normally, the first thing one notices when they enter the warehouse is the size. Just how big it really is. Normally, following that comes the lack of light, and somewhere after that comes a sudden and ultimately silly fascination with just what was in those boxes sitting there, and who exactly owned the building.

However, the first thing the trio noticed as they went in was the man in the stylish tweed suit and blue eyes that was standing in the middle of the room with a large, cruel grin on his face.

>
"I thought," he said with a deep, yet crisp voice which held a

particularly fine British accent, "that I requested you come alone..."

>
Xander grimaced, then turned back to his two helpers in fake shock.

>
"What, you can see my invisible friends?" he asked, his face completely straight.

>
"Please," the man responded, the malice in his voice nearly palpable, "No games. I hate you, and I hate the family that spawned you. Not only that, but I hate this place. And most of all, I hate imbeciles. So kindly stop with the bloody jokes, tell them to leave, and let us get on with it."

>
"No sense of humor..." Xander stated, rubbing his chin, "I totally dislike that in a man. You take yourself too seriously..."

>
"I think," the other responded, "that of all things in this room, I am the thing YOU should take seriously, considering I will be the one that fries your pathetic carcass this night."

>
"My name's Xander," the young necromancer responded, completely ignoring the last comment, "And yours?"

>
"My name is Nigel Brondstaff..." he responded through his teeth, obviously trying not to kill the boy before time, "and I have come here to kill you. Now make these two go, and we will duel as we must and you will die..."

>
"Don't become a psychic..." Xander told him good-naturedly, then his voice turned hard, "And they aren't leaving..."

>
"They leave," Brondstaff proclaimed, "Or I will make them wish they had..."

>
"No."

>
"Fine," Bronstaff replied, lifting his hand from his side, "Then they will pay for your games..."

>
As he said the words, a ball of large black flame left his fingertips and went hurtling towards the Slayer and the commando. The two of them tried to duck away from the incredibly fast projectile, but they couldn't. But just as it was about to hit them, the ball of black flame seemed to hit a wall of blue glass. Buffy and Riley both turned to Xander in surprise, and found him holding his hand towards them. He grinned at them, and then turned to face the smug bastard who had sent the flames at his friends.

>
"Don't" Xander informed him, his eyes blazing with power and rage, "Ever try to attack my friends."

>
"I think you should be worried about yourself, young man..." the other replied with a chuckle, "You know you're going to lose. You have the most infinitesimal knowledge of your powers, and I have been studying for years. You haven't got a chance."

>
"Yes I have..." Xander replied, moving his hand ever so slightly, "Because while you were busy being a haughty asshole, I've been working..."

>
Even as the words left the boy's lips, Brondstaff could see the light blue wall that now surrounded the boy himself, and he could feel the power and strength of it.

>
"And unlike you, I'm ready to go..."

>
Suddenly, a rain of white flame came down upon Nigel, who quickly put up a barrier. It wasn't as well constructed as Xander's, but it would hold during the onslaught for as long as he needed. The older Necromancer grimaced, and then finished his counter, which sent a large bit of blue lightning towards his opponent.

>
Xander's shield wavered a bit from that, but held, yet the young raiser was worried. That hadn't been in any book. But Xander didn't let that worry him for long. He immediately put his mind to the next task at hand, finishing it quickly.

>
A second later, at least twelve zombies walked into the warehouse, and quickly made their way over to Brondstaff and walked through his shields, attacking him with a ferocity that amazed all there. The fact that something dead could feel be filled with such hatred from the power given it by Xander scared both Xander himself, and Buffy.

>
Nigel, however, quickly stopped the zombies, and sent them at Xander. However, the younger man's defenses were far better, and they actually stopped the corpses. After realizing this, the Brit gave up on that plan and went back to using brute force and pure power.

>
Buffy and Riley watched as the battle went on, awed at the amazing amount of power that was flying through the air between the two. She was glad that Xander's shield was up, even if it wasn't quite as fine as his own. The Slayer didn't want to get hit with a stray something-or-other.

>
But as they watched, they got increasingly upset. Xander's power was obviously greater, but his lack of training and expertise was hurting him badly as he took hits that his opponent easily avoided somehow. Slowly, far more slow than she'd expected, Xander was losing. And there was not a thing they could do about it. The crossbow bolts couldn't cross the shield and there was no way she would distract her friend long enough to drop them, because it would end up with him being dead. It looked as if she was going to witness the death of her best friend anyway, though.

>
The Slayer stopped watching for a moment, and looked back at Riley, tears in her eyes. He knew what she was feeling, for he had felt it every time one of the Initiative got turned into a hostile before his eyes, or were ripped to shreds as he tried to escape. It was a feeling of ultimate uselessness, the ultimate loss of control. And it pained them to the core, even Riley. True, he didn't really like Xander all that much, but the guy was honest, brave, loyal, smart, and willing to die to help his friends, even before he'd found his talent. He wished there was something he could do.

>
The two of them turned at the latest crash of thunder to see Xander huddled on the floor. He was still fighting, but his shield had had to be made smaller to keep it at full power. Yet even now, they could see that it was slowly being chipped away by the other's magicks, and Xander's attacks, while making serious damage, were infrequent, due to the need to keep his shield up. And despite his work, that was falling.

>
Finally, his shield was down to nothing, or next to nothing. This was it. Buffy was going to watch another of her friends die, and there was little she could do. The screen was barely seeable, and it waves as if blown by the wind. Brondstaff grinned wickedly despite his own weakened defenses and fatigue, then prepared his final spell, putting everything into it.

>
Buffy watched as it hurtled toward her friend, a large white ball of flame. She couldn't even watch her friend, it was too painful, so she watched the barrier. The lightest blue, nearly gone, wavering slightly from the energies in the room, about to give out, barrier.

>
But just as it was about to hit Xander, the black flame hit a wall. Buffy looked around wildly, then found out who had helped him. There was a man standing behind Xander, who was at this moment putting his hand on the boy's shoulder. He looked to be about fourty, with dark blonde, nearly brown, hair and green eyes that were glimmering with something Buffy couldn't really identify. She was more than grateful to him, but she had no idea who he was. Neither did Riley. But they found out who he was a second later when he

whispered something to a startled Xander on the battlefield.

>
"I got your back, son..."

>
Xander didn't even look back.

>
"Dad?"

>
"I've been a bastard all these years. If I hadn't allowed myself to be such a horrible father, you'd have been prepared for this," Ambrose whispered, the self-loathing in his voice sad to hear, "instead of being beaten by this smug little Brondstaff bastard."

>
The words rang across the room, and Nigel, hearing them, said, "You can't interfere, Ambrose. It's against the rules!"

>
"You broke the rules the second you challenged him!" Ambrose roared back, "He is inexperienced, a youngling in the Family. Having been only two days old with his powers, he is considered a minor, and therefore not challengeable."

>
"But..." Nigel returned with a cruel smirk, crossing his arms, "he accepted, making the challenge unchangeable."

>
"But I didn't agree, and being his parent, only that would make it official..."

>
"Rubish..."

>
"True!" Xander's father yelled, "You could be killed by this afterwards, by your own family, for breaking the Agreement. Why would you forsake your own life to get rid of him?"

>
"Because..." the other man said, closing his eyes in anger, "It would be better for me to die by my own Family's hand, but worse for us all to perish..."

>
"All to - NOW SON!"

>
At that moment, Xander let loose with everything he had, and Nigel, who was too busy being a smart ass, had no time to dodge or fortify his barrier. The weak shield he had made with some of the last of his power fell to the young LaVelle's onslaught, and the power hit the enemy Necromancer with full force. Nigel Brondstaff fell to the ground.

>
Xander immediately broke all his barriers, and he ran over to where his enemy lay dying.

>
"Why couldn't you have died?" The Brondstaff croaked sadly, "Why did you have to be the-"

>
A fit of coughing stopped his speech, and Xander pushed the other Necromancer up so he could breath better in his last moments.

>
"Why couldn't have died?" he asked again, his eyes glazing over, "Now, Lori will never-"

>
And that was it. He was dead. His eyes closed, and his mouth stopped. His chest didn't rise. And there was Xander, who had held the enemy as he died. He couldn't believe it. He'd just killed someone. He'd just killed a man. A man, whom he suspected, who had a daughter. And a wife. And a family. And a future. But most important, a man who was human, who had a soul.

>
He hadn't wanted to. Lord knows he had never truly wanted to kill anyone. Demons, vampires, monsters...those he could kill. But not a person. Dear God, not a person. Not someone with a soul. Yet he'd done it. He'd done it to survive, to save himself and his friends.

>
When he'd set out earlier, Xander hadn't really considered all the consequences of the fight. Sure, he'd thought that he might die. That was an obvious problem. But he'd never really thought what he'd lose if he won. But he knew that winning had cost him almost as much as losing, because he'd taken a human life, and that would always affect him.

>
It reminded him of something Willow had told him one day as they were sitting around. He couldn't remember it exactly, but it was something around, "There are no glorious victories, because those who win live to see the battleground..." And it was so true it made his heart ache. Xander looked around, taking in the shattered boxes, the singed walls, his friends, his father, but most importantly the body in his arms.

>
Suddenly, he felt two hands touching him on the shoulders. He looked up one arm to see Buffy standing there, a sad smile on her face. Xander gazed into her eyes and let her see just what he was feeling, and she understood exactly. It was a danger, something the Slayer had always feared since Faith had done it. Killing a person, someone with a soul. She understood as well as she could how Xander felt. She rubbed his shoulder for a second, then walked away.

>
Xander looked up the other arm to see the face of his father. It looked tired, so sad and filled with guilt. And the two just stared at one another for a second, each letting the other know with silence just how they felt. Finally, Xander's father pulled back, hauling Xander to his feet.

>
"Thanks Dad, for helping me out..."

>
Xander's father grimaced, and he looked as if he wanted to smack himself, "I don't deserve thanks..."

>
"Not for most stuff..." he admitted, "But for this, yes you do."

>
"But-"

>
"You didn't have to come after me," He said quietly, "You didn't have to help me. But you did. So I'm saying thanks..."

>
There was silence between the two, then Ambrose asked, "So, what are you going to do?"

>
Another gap of silence came, and then Xander replied softly, "Well, I think I'm going to keep my stuff exactly where it is and give your sorry ass another chance..."

>
Ambrose couldn't believe it. He was getting a second chance. A second chance to be a father. A second chance to be a teacher, and a guide. A chance to make up for all he'd done to his own flesh and blood. He was so happy, but he didn't dare hug Xander right now. He didn't want to push it.

>
"But I am going to go on a trip..."

>
At this Buffy and Riley went over, and Ambrose's eyes widened. He was leaving?

>
"Where are you going?" Buffy asked, a little upset that he was leaving. She'd miss him so much if he left. She'd miss his jokes, his smile, his heart-lightening attitude about everything. What would the Scoobies do without their Xander-shaped member?

>
"Don't really know." Xander answered, "But I need a little time to myself, to figure things out. To work through this. I won't let it take me down, but I do need some...space."

>
"But-"

>
"No, Buffster..." he said, turning to face her, "I know how I work. And I know I get things out of my system better when I'm alone...that's how I've done it..."

>
"But you don't have to do it alone anymore!" Buffy cried.

>
"No, I don't have to..." he admitted, "But I need to."

>
Buffy stopped arguing, and let the expression on his face sink in. He was serious. He had adapted to being alone, and now he worked better for it. He was independent, more so than even she was, and that hurt her a bit. She realized that Xander had stayed with the

Scoobies not out of need, but out of love. And she was glad.

>
"Okay, you work it the way you need to...but remember that you have your friends to talk to..."

>
"I will..."

>
Buffy sensed then that Xander would like to be alone with his father, so she grabbed Riley and walked out.

>
"See you, Xander!"

>
"Bye."

>
And that left the two Harrises, or rather the two LaVelles.

>
"So you're going?" Ambrose asked.

>
"Yeah...give you a little time to clean up..." He sounded very tired.

>
"Okay."

>
"Yeah."

>
"I'll miss you..."

>
"Same here..."

>
"When?"

>
"Tomorrow, after I say goodbye to everyone. Will you be there?"

>
"Yeah."

>
"Good..."

>

>Epilogue

>Xander left the next day, and while they were all very sad to see him go, they gave him a very nice goodbye. And despite how much Xander replied that it was more of a "see ya later" than a "goodbye", everyone could feel the finality of his departure. He would return, they knew, but when he did, he would be a rather different man. Yet, they knew it was the best thing for him, and themselves.

>Everyone cried during the little party they threw him before he left, and Riley got a little choked up as he gave the young Necromancer a bear-hug for the road. True, they hadn't been close, but the guy had saved his life, so Riley was a little upset at his going away. He would miss Xander's jokes, his upbeat, positive attitude, and the little laughs that had helped the Scoobies succeed more often than even they realized.

>"Have a nice trip, Xander..."

>"Thanks, Soldier Boy..."

>There was a pause, and then Xander pulled him close. "You'll take care of Buffy, won't you?"

>The commando looked startled, then nodded at the young Necromancer. "I will. I'll make sure she doesn't get into too much trouble..."

>Xander laughed for a moment, then smiled, "She does that naturally...but make sure that you help her get out of it when she does, okay? And don't break her heart..."

>"All right, Xander..." Riley assured him, pulling back.

>"Good, cause if anything happens to her, I'll kick your ass..."

>The commando's eyes widened in surprise, then he nodded once more. Xander waved to him goodbye, a small ball of black flame in his palm where no one else would see it.

>Buffy was crying as she embraced him to tell him goodbye. She felt like something had been stolen from her, something precious that she'd never truly appreciated until then. He'd saved her life more times than she could remember, and power had not changed him in that

aspect, nor any other. The Slayer hated Brondstaff for taking him away from her, from them, with his death. She wished he had never come. But he had, and he had changed so much inside of her Xander-shaped friend. She knew that she would never really understand what Xander was going through right now, and what he had gone through for all those years, but she knew that she had to at least try. She had to at least be a friend.

>"I'll miss you, Xander..." she said after they parted.

>"Me too, Buffster..."

>"Come back in one piece, okay?"

>"Promise..." Xander replied, holding his fingers up, "Scout's honor. Just make sure you take care of yourself..."

>"I will."

>The young Necromancer smiled, then winked at the Slayer he loved like a sister. "Good, cause if anything happens, it's Soldier-boy's ass..."

>"What?"

>Xander grinned again, then told her, "Nothing..."

>Tears escaped Tara's eyes as well as the blonde witch gave him a quick hug farewell. She hadn't known the young man all that long, and mostly she was very shy with him, but he had always tried to be nice to her, to charm her, to make her smile. She realized that his leaving would affect her friends deeply, as it would, she admitted to herself, affect her. He was a very special person, the young witch knew, not just because of what he was, but who he was. She was glad she had met him.

>"See ya!"

>"You too..."

>"Take this..." The young witch held out a strangely shaped metal piece that made his hand itch. It had a key chain attachment.

>"It's to ward off evil and bad luck..." Tara explained at his puzzled expression.

>Xander looked down at thing in his hand, then brought his eyes back to Tara's face.

>"Thanks, I can definitely use this little beauty...and I appreciate the work you must have done on it."

>"Don't worry about it..." the young witch assured him, "Just take care, be careful, and have a good time..."

>"I will", he answered, beginning to walk away, "See ya, Tara..."

>Giles didn't cry, but he certainly got choked up as he embraced the young man before he left. The Watcher had never really let him know, but he respected Xander immensely. Xander, a completely normal human, had always tried to help out, and he'd never backed down despite the lack of any otherworldly defense. The boy was a smart one, if a bit lucky, and his aid had been more helpful than he'd always thought before that day. Giles would never forget his nick-name of "G-man", nor would he fail to remember all the times his sense of humor and bright spirit had pulled the gang out of a rut. The group was losing a valuable member, but the Watcher felt almost as if he was losing a younger brother, or perhaps a son.

>The Englishman gave him a rather stiff hug, then pulled him back.

>"Take care, Xander. For if anything happened to you, I doubt this group would recover..."

>"Thanks for the concern, Giles," Xander replied, a slightly glad grin on his face, "But I'll be okay..."

>"Not only would the group be hurt," the Watcher admitted softly, "I would as well. You are a special young man, and that has nothing to

do with your powers. You are truly someone who has made my life better, and I value that. Thank you, Xander, for not letting me take myself too seriously. Thank you for giving us something to laugh at in this wretched place..."

>"No problem, G-man" Xander told him, the grin now as bright as the Las Vegas strip, "And I will return!"

>"I'm sure you will, my young man..." Giles answered, "Just make sure you don't mature too much..."

>"I won't."

>But the person most affected in the Scoobie gang was Willow. The young redheaded witch was sobbing her eyes out, despite Xander's assurances that he would return, in one piece, soon, without fail, not to mention several promises that he would write and call her constantly. The two had been best friends since they were three, and despite the distance that had begun to open between them, they were still very close. He'd always been there for her, protecting her from the cool kids' barbs, or picking her up when she was down, not to mention always trying to keep her safe when they fought beside Buffy, despite his own mortality. And he'd always listened to her, even when she was just babbling or being silly. She was losing her best friend, and a major support in the wall of her existence.

>"I'm gonna miss you, Xander, I wish you didn't go!" Willow cried.

>"But I have to," Xander told her, "And I'll be back..."

>"Not soon enough for me!"

>"Well, nothing I can do about that, Wils, but I do have to go. I have to work all this out, figure out what all this means, what my powers mean, what my new family means."

>"I know, but- "

>"I'll miss you too, Willow, but I'll be back before you know it. And I'll make sure to call your room every night, okay?"

>"Fine, but you had better not forget!" Willow yelled with mock anger in her tone.

>"Promise!"

>The two friends hugged once more, then Xander headed for his car.

>After the Scoobies said goodbye, Xander got into his car with the savings he had from all his jobs and his suitcase. But just as he was about to leave, a car pulled up and two people got out. It was his father and his uncle, arms around one another's shoulders as if the years of separation had never happened. The two brothers walked to his car, and said their farewells.

>"Well, son," his father said, "I'll try to use the time your away productively. Clean up, attend AA or whatever..."

>"Make sure you do that." Xander answered, starting the engine.

>Ambrose smiled at his only child, then ran his gruff hand through the boy's dark hair.

>"I hope that during your trip, you'll think over what we talked about the other night...about our family..." He looked a bit nervous, as if he was afraid that Xander would refuse him at that moment. He wasn't sure he should have touched him.

>Xander assure his father that it was okay by taking Ambrose's hand in his own and holding it for a long minute.

>"I can't forget what you did to me..."Xander told him quietly, "But I forgive you. Just make it so that I don't have to remember anything like that again, okay, old man?"

>Ambrose overlooked the "old man" comment, and smiled at his son. He was so proud he could burst. Then he pulled away from the window to allow his brother a chance to say goodbye.

>"Well, I'll be seeing you, Xander!" The friendly shopkeeper told him with that strange grin that seemed to run in the family, "and just remember that if you ever need it, you can ask any LaVelle for help, and you'll get it. Especially me!"

>"Okay, Uncle Gerard..." Xander replied, sounding bored.

>"Don't 'okay' me, young man!" Gerard admonished, pointing his finger in mock severity, "Remember it. It's important. And be careful whom you trust. There are many who'll be looking for you, now that you are the only one left..."

>"Okay, Uncle Gerard," the young Necromancer told him seriously, "I'll be careful!"

>"Fine. Have a nice trip!"

>"I will!"

>And with that, Gerard pulled away from the car and Xander began driving. He didn't know where he was going exactly, just that he had to leave. He had a lot on his mind. He was confused about who, and what, he was, not to mention what the future had in store for him. His powers had set him on a path that was far different than any he had ever imagined, and now he had killed a man. As he turned, he wondered vaguely what Nigel had been saying about him as he died, and who 'Lori' might be.

>He drove where he felt he should, turning when he felt he should, which took him to one exit he'd never thought of. Yet, as the turn came up, he knew that was where he had to go.

>Los Angeles.

>The End!

>Send all feedback to HuffPuff1228@yahoo.com

>

> <p><p>

End
file.